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PRIMITIVE AREAS IN THE NATIONAL FORESTS

Radio Talk by L. F. Kneipp, Assistant Chief, in charge of Land Acquisition, Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture, broadcast in the Conservation Day period of the National Farm and Home Hour Friday, June 18, 1937, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of associated radio stations from coast to coast.

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Nobody can forecast the future with any certainty. But in the light of all present trends, it seems inevitable that, in time, there will be five people in the United States where there are now four; that for every square mile of land there will be one mile or more of good roads; that upon such roads there will be three automobiles where there are now two; that droning in the skies above us there will be ten aircraft where there is now one; that our lives will be more and more adapted to mechanized modes that move with split-second speed and dynamic force, which will tax our frail bodies and our mental and physical reflexes by their tempo and power; that more and more men and women will work out their economic destinies by endless repetitions of a single limited function in an endless chain of production that affords no opportunity for individualistic creative work; that we will shuttle back and forth each day between the cubicle in which we live and the one in which we work, in an environment in which all of the works of nature are dominated or excluded by the works of man.

Unless age-old concepts of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness undergo profound changes, the blessings of this impending condition may be cancelled out by its evils. Certain of the qualities of mind and body with which we humans have been endowed by a beneficent nature may become atrophied because the means for their exercise have ceased to exist. While we may develop new capacities to cope with intricate problems of social and economic relationships, we may lose our age-old capacity to cope with the forces of nature. Our advances in the fields of science and the mechanical arts may be unprecedented, but may be at the expense of spiritual forces which can attain their full flower only under simple modes of life in close association with nature and her works. Only by anticipating these evils can we avert them.

In this new order of life into which we are moving, one of the most priceless privileges which the individual can enjoy will be that of solitude, of complete detachment from the intensity and turmoil of metropolitan life. of escape from the pressure of teeming thousands. But it must be an attractive and interesting form of solitude; one which enriches and stimulates the mind, which develops the body by creating the need for physical qualities which through all history have commanded the admiration of men, qualities of hardihood, endurance, strength, resistance to adverse natural forces, combined with skill in interpreting and effectively conforming to the laws of nature. It was by the exercise of these qualities that our forebears conquered a continent and built a nation; and to sympathetically understand and appreciate the tremendous adverse forces with which they had to contend, we of this present generation, and those of the generations which are to follow, must have available to us adequate territories in which there still exist, and will continue to exist, the same unmodified conditions of nature which characterized this continent during the pioneer stages of our history.

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That fact became evident to the Forest Service almost a decade ago. It so happens that within the National Forests lie most of the parts of the United States which have not been invaded by highways or roads, and in which flora, fauna and general environment most nearly perpetuate virgin conditions. It is, of course, true that not even these areas are absolutely primitive and unmodified, for they have not wholly escaped human invasion. Within their limits can be found the traces of the early trappers, the prospectors and miners, the cow-puncher and the shepherd; the ditches and dams of irrigation systems; the overgrown roads of soldiers and pioneers. Nevertheless, they are the nearest approaches we can now hope to have of truly primitive areas.

No one can foretell the degree to which the resources of these areas will be required to meet the future economic and social needs of the people of the United States. It may be that their woods and waters, their minerals, their wealth of palatable forage eventually will be needed to maintain industry and commerce, to afford dependent local populations means of continuing their economic existence. It is, however, to be hoped that will not be the case. But, so far as can now be foreseen, these areas indefinitely can be maintained in their present primitive condition, with benefit and advantage to the people of the United States greater than could be realized by more intensive industry utilization or by penetrating their hidden recesses with high speed roads, or by encouraging large numbers of people to occupy them with summer homes and related facilities.

So about seven years ago, the Secretary of Agriculture promulgated a regulation under which the Chief of the Forest Service is empowered to designate "Primitive Areas" within which will be maintained primitive conditions of transportation, subsistence and environment. Since that time 67 such areas have formally been designated. The largest contains 1,088,000 acres; the smallest only 5,000 acres; all of them together 11,322,791 acres, of which all but 492,000 acres is owned and controlled by Uncle Sam. In these areas are parts of Olympics, Cascades, Coast Range, Sierra Nevada, Uintas, Continental Divide, Rockies, and other lesser mountain chains. One of the largest embraces some of the wonderful lake country along the International boundary in northern Minnesota.

So there are still mountain ranges showing faintly blue against the horizon which hold, and will continue to hold a challenge to the man, woman, boy or girl who cherish the ways of their forefathers and finds keen enjoyment in pitting their muscles and minds against the forces of nature. They will find no trains, busses, motor cars or even buckboards; they will walk or ride a horse. They will find no swanky hotels, or boarding houses, or restaurants or wayside hot-dog stands; their shelter and their bed and their board will be what they carry with them. There will be no obsequious servants to anticipate their every want; they will themselves make their beds and cook and wash and chop the firewood; unless they are opulent enough to hire a guide, and even then the guide will expect them to do their share of the work. There will be no blase orchestra to play "hot" tunes, no waxed floor on which to demonstrate the latest glide. But there will be the rustle of the breeze in the trees, and the murmur of flowing waters, the clang of horse-bells, the bark of a coyote, the mysterious little sounds of the night; perhaps, in season, the bugling of a bull elk. So they won't miss the things that are not there; in fact they may be supremely and superlatively happy because such things are not there.

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